The Battle for Hearts and Minds: Assessing Militant Propaganda Narratives in Northern Ireland

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Note: This thesis is primarily intended as a theory-building project; I am currently in the process of solidifying the logic of the theory. While the majority of my empirical data has been collected, it has not yet been tested against my hypothesis. In this paper, I present a literature review, a brief overview of the Northern Irish Conflict and the conflict murals, the logic of my theoretical expectations, and my methodological plan going forward.

Introduction

How do insurgents utilize propaganda to advance their strategic goals? Propaganda has a very long history; it has been used in some form since ancient times. The term itself has origins in the Catholic Church's *Congregation de Propaganda Fide*, which was established in the seventeenth century to regulate the spread of Catholic teaching to non-Christian lands.[1] Yet the full power of propaganda would not be realized until the twentieth century.[2] With the outbreak of World War I, states needed to galvanize their publics to take part in the "war to end all wars". The resulting proliferation of Propaganda Ministries led to sustained and highly effective campaigns to mobilize citizens for the war effort and to undermine enemy soldiers and civilians.

In the aftermath of World War I, several propagandists published accounts of their activities during the war.[3] This prompted academics to begin to explore the question of how a small group of professional decision-makers could successfully manipulate and direct the opinion of entire nations. This interest was amplified over the course of the twentieth century, as further evidence accrued of propaganda's potential impact. Totalitarian regimes, including Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the Soviet Union, came under examination for their powerful, and apparently all-encompassing propaganda machines. In addition, democratic states such as the United States, Great Britain and France were examined for their ability to influence the opinions of their citizens, as well as citizens of foreign countries.[4]

In general, studies of propaganda have tended to keep pace with contemporary events, reflecting the impact that particular campaigns have on the political conflicts of a given moment in time. Consequently, the majority of studies have tended to focus on the propaganda of states,

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[1] Fellows 1959

[2] I define propaganda in line with Jowett and O'Donnell's definition: "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist."

[3] See, for example, George Creel, "How We Advertised America" (1920) and Edward Bernays, "Propaganda" (1928).

[4] An important example is Western radio propaganda directed against citizens of communist countries during the Cold War

particularly during the course of war. These studies have produced important insights into the ways in which coordinated campaigns of propaganda may impact the beliefs of mass publics (Ellul 1962; Lasswell 1927; Herman and Chomsky 1988). However, since they are limited to states, these studies have restricted their analysis to situations in which the propagandist has considerable, and in some cases total, control over the audience's informational milieu.

While such a context made sense in the analysis of the state propaganda of the twentieth century, more recent conflicts reflect a different reality. The growth in civil wars and insurgent campaigns has resulted in situations in which propagandists must operate in contested spaces. Neither side may exert total or even near-total control over the message received by its target audience. Nevertheless, insurgent and terrorist groups regularly engage in propaganda campaigns. In some cases, including those of al Qaeda and ISIS, they may develop extensive, sophisticated propaganda networks to disseminate their message.[5] As such, new scholarship is necessary to understand how substate militants' propaganda campaigns function and whether or not they are effective.

This project attempts to provide a preliminary analysis of militant propaganda by focusing on the conflict murals painted by both Unionist and Republican partisans in the Northern Irish conflict. Both groups engaged in a sustained campaign of painting murals within neighborhoods that they controlled during the course of the conflict, colloquially known as "The Troubles". These murals, which reflected the political positions of the local combatants, served as an important source of political messaging and propaganda during the second half of the Northern Irish conflict. The Northern Irish conflict, which lasted nearly thirty years and involved sustained violence between Republican secessionist insurgents, Unionist paramilitaries, and state

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[5] Brookings Institute 2015; Black 2013; Khan 2013

security forces,[6] provides a particularly excellent case study for the examination of militant propaganda. Since both sides of the conflict had substate militant groups that exerted considerable control in urban neighborhoods, it is possible to compare the messages of both secessionist and pro-state forces. Moreover, the conflict murals allow for the study of a distinctive form of highly visual political messaging that was used by both sides during a set time period (1981-1998). Moreover, these murals were frequently painted and replaced throughout the course of the conflict, and, as such, provide extensive variation for study.

In this paper, I will present a brief review of the literature on propaganda, followed by a discussion of the Northern Irish Troubles and the conflict murals. I will then present my empirical puzzles and preliminary theory, and will conclude with an outline of my research methodology going forward.

Literature Review

Existing literature on propaganda is scattered among a variety of disciplines, with very little in the way of theoretical frameworks to guide scholars. Beyond the memoirs and historical analyses that exist on particular propaganda campaigns, social science has left this field seriously under-analyzed. Existing works have tended to focus on one of two broad topics: the narratives of propaganda, or on the functions and effects of propaganda.

In one of the earliest attempts to systematically analyze propaganda as a political phenomenon, Harold Lasswell's *Propaganda Technique in the World War* represents a significant milestone. Lasswell describes the propaganda approach of the main powers in World War I. In particular, he outlines five messaging goals for wartime propaganda: 1) assigning war guilt and identifying war aims, 2) portraying the enemy as Satan, 3) providing the illusion of victory, 4) preserving friendship, and 5) demoralizing the enemy. Lasswell does also indicate

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[6] These include both Northern Irish police forces (the Royal Ulster Constabulary) and the British Army.

some contributing factors for propaganda effectiveness. He argues that propaganda is most effective where it is coordinated among all parties of a conflict (different government offices and different allies). It also should reflect considerable knowledge of the target population and use every possible medium to direct emotional appeals at targeted segments of the population. Where this is done, the propagandist can create demand for unpopular policies in the population in order to advance the war effort.

Lasswell's work did a great deal to define propaganda as a phenomenon and to explain the manner in which it functioned in the First World War.[7] While his typology of propaganda methods provides a useful overarching framework for considering the messages wartime propaganda should send, this study is largely descriptive, and the methods it outlines are inevitably bounded to the time period that it describes.

Joanne Wright's *Terrorist Propaganda* (1991) provides an important extension of Lasswell's work, as well as one of the few serious analyses of the use of propaganda by substate militant groups. Like Lasswell, Wright's focus is on the nature of the propaganda narrative. She argues that the key determinant of propaganda narrative is the target audience. She distinguishes between the active, supportive, and uncommitted audiences as the most salient recipients of terrorist propaganda. She argues that the content of a propaganda message is largely driven by the intended recipient of the message. Thus, while propaganda aimed at the uncommitted audience should build sympathy for the plight of the community the terrorist claims to represent, propaganda aimed at the sympathetic audience seeks to build commitment to the cause, and propaganda aimed at the active audience is intended to maintain morale in the face of hardship.

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[7] Lasswell extended his analysis in *World Revolutionary Propaganda: A Chicago Study* (1939), which explored the propaganda of communist activists in Chicago in the 1930s.

Wright's framework is useful for analyzing terrorist propaganda, and her distinction based on audience type provides a theoretical explanation for how terrorist groups may craft narratives. However, this categorization is not comprehensive. Importantly, it fails to include the enemy audience, which is a significant gap, as the enemy is often a very important target of terrorist propaganda. In general, Wright's work is primarily descriptive, and gives very little in the way of systematic analysis of what propaganda is or how it actually functions in the affected societies. Although the concept of audience differentiation is useful, it is not clear how to it should be recognized *ex ante*. In many cases, active, sympathetic, and uncommitted audiences may live in the same communities and be exposed to much of the same messaging. It is not clear how an observer could recognize propaganda as clearly being directed at one group or the other. Although the concepts presented in this book are useful, Wright's analysis has left a gap in the literature for a rigorous analysis of the purposes of propaganda narratives as they actually function in conflict.

While the debate over the source of propaganda narratives has been crucial to shaping the field, a second debate in the propaganda literature has centered on the purposes and effects of propaganda. Many scholars have argued that propaganda is essentially a tool for bureaucratic direction of the will of the masses. Considerable debate exists over whether this serves the interest of functioning democracy (Bernays 1928) or undermines it (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Lippmann 1922). Jacques Ellul argues that propaganda is a necessary component of a modern democracy, and one that requires every state to deploy the full range of its media to overwhelm its citizens with the core messages of the state from every direction at all times. Writing in the context of the propaganda campaigns of the Cold War, Ellul argued that such a function had to be performed by every state, and could be done effectively only by states, since only states had

the resources to effectively conduct a campaign of total media inundation.[8] Although empirical evidence has demonstrated that this is not necessarily the case, Ellul points very effectively to the importance of multifaceted and overwhelming propaganda to effectively direct the opinions of mass audiences. Moreover, his argument presents the ideal to which propagandists may strive, namely the ability to completely surround their target population with the desired narrative.

Recent efforts have been made to provide more general discussion of propaganda in light of greater historical evidence. In *Propaganda and Persuasion*, Jowett and O'Donnell (2011) devote considerable attention to defining and categorizing propaganda. Jowett and O'Donnell define propaganda as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist." In creating a typology of propaganda, they distinguish between agitative propaganda and integrative propaganda, as well as between black, gray, and white propaganda. Black propaganda is factually inaccurate, and comes from a concealed source. Gray propaganda is factually uncertain and the source may or may not be correctly identified. White propaganda is factually accurate, with a correctly identified source.

Jowett and O'Donnell's work is of considerable value in conceptualizing what propaganda is. Moreover, it provides insight into how different forms of propaganda may be designed to shape different reactions. However, this work is still primarily descriptive and gives little insight into the actual mechanisms by which propaganda affects its recipients. This has been the general trend in studies of propaganda, although some recent work has used natural experiments to challenge that norm. Such studies provide some valuable evidence that propaganda may have a causal impact in directing audience attitudes and behaviors

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[8] This is not to suggest that Ellul viewed mass propaganda as a positive. He argued that it leaves the individual subject to serious elite manipulation, forcing mass conformity.

(Yanagizawa-Drott; Della Vigna et. al). Yet this is a burgeoning area of research and far greater empirical work is necessary to effectively assess the effects of propaganda.

While the effects of propaganda are theoretically important, and I hope to address them in future work, this paper will primarily be focused on the first debate, that of the purpose of propaganda narratives. I hope to develop a rigorous form of analysis that will allow scholars to theorize the purpose of specific narratives in the context of sub-state propaganda. I hope that this will lay the groundwork for a future analysis of the effects of propaganda more broadly.

A Brief History of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is an unusual political entity. Although it is contiguous with the Republic of Ireland, the six counties known as Ulster are officially a part of the United Kingdom. As a historical legacy of British efforts to transplant Protestants loyal to the Crown to Ireland in the 17th century, this is the only part of Ireland to have a Protestant majority.[9] In Ireland, religion has largely mapped onto political affiliation and national loyalties. Catholics, who were historically oppressed by discriminatory laws and social policies, tended to support greater autonomy, or even complete independence, from Britain. Protestants, who enjoyed greater legal and economic privilege, generally supported continued unity with Britain.[10]

From 1919-1921, Irish rebels operating under the name of the Irish Republican Army launched a rebellion against the British government, which culminated in the establishment of a semi-autonomous Irish Free State.[11] However, in the treaty establishing the Free State, Ulster was given the choice to vote to remain a part of Britain, which it did. This new province of

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[9] Coogan (2002)

[10] Although relevant group membership often aligns with religion, this is not always the case. For clarity and acuracy, I will refer to political alignment in describing the militant groups. I use the terms "republican" and "nationalist" interchangeably, and do likewise with the terms "unionist" and "loyalist."

[11] The 26 counties of the Irish Free State officially became the Republic of Ireland in 1948, with the Republic of Ireland Act

Northern Ireland exercised considerable governmental autonomy and over the years, the regional assembly enacted a number of policies that, either in their text or implementation, discriminated against Catholics. Cities of Northern Ireland were essentially segregated on sectarian lines and Catholics found that it was almost impossible to access key jobs, particularly in the government and the police. Extensive gerrymandering served to entrench these inequalities.[12]

Although protests against this situation of sectarian division were initially peaceful, in the wake of high-profile crackdowns on protests, the civil rights movement eventually gave way to an outbreak of terrorist violence.[13] Ireland had a long history of militant groups, but the most serious violence would launched by the Provisional Irish Republican Army (the PIRA, or the 'Provos'[14]), which split from the older Official Irish Republican Army (the 'Officials') in 1969 over the question of the proper role of physical force in the struggle for Irish independence.[15] The split became official in 1970, and the PIRA gradually emerged as the stronger faction.[16] The Provisionals began to directly engage in violence in 1970, as several armed clashes with Unionist gunmen, as well as with British Army soldiers, launched the wave of bloodshed that would eventually come to be known as the Troubles. The brutality of the Provos was met with violence from Unionist paramilitaries, who would often take it upon themselves to target local Catholics for violence.[17]

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[12] Coogan (2002)

[13] Coogan 2002

[14] Other paramilitary groups have existed in the Republican movement, including the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) and the Irish People's Liberation Organization (IPLO). The Provos were the most important, and are the focus of this paper. I will discuss the other groups at greater length in the final thesis, however the analysis remains fundamentally unchanged.

[15] The Official IRA was essentially a Marxist group that viewed the sectarian conflict as an attempt by the bourgeoisie to pit the working classes against each other on the basis of religion. As a result, they were reluctant to use force to defend Catholic neighborhoods. Moreover, the Officials were willing to recognize the 26 county Republic of Ireland, which has historically been considered illegitimate by Republicans. Although the Provisionals were socialists, they were strongly committed to the tradition of physical force republicanism.

[16] Feeney 2002

[17] Coogan 2002

The cycle of violence escalated throughout the 1970s. However, in 1981, the Republicans began to add an extra political dimension to their overall strategy. When several Republican prisoners in the Maze prisons began to launch a hunger strike in protest of their status as regular criminals (as opposed to political prisoners[18]), the political wing of the PIRA, Sinn Féin, decided to use the event to launch a massive international PR campaign.[19] In particular, the group made the conscious decision to employ political elections as a tool of nationalist resistance, arguing that it would combine the "armalite and the ballot box" in resistance. The movement was hugely successful in attracting public attention, and the leader of the hunger strikers, Bobby Sands, was actually elected a Member of Parliament for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, though he never took his seat and died on hunger strike on May 5, 1981.[20]

From the time of the hunger strikes until the end of the conflict in April 1998, sectarian resistance would combine both violent and propagandistic elements. The former have been well studied.[21] This essay will explore the development of tools of propaganda in the course of the conflict, with a specific focus on the murals that developed in the aftermath of the hunger strike.

The Murals

Murals have a long history in Northern Ireland.[22] Since 1908, Protestant groups have utilized this art form as a means of celebrating key moments in Protestant history. Initially,

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[18] At the onset of violence in Northern Ireland, Republican prisoners were given special privileges that amounted to their being considered 'political' as opposed to 'criminal' prisoners. This policy was revoked in 1976, due to the belief that the provision of special status for Republican prisoners was undermining prison discipline. PIRA prisoners objected to being treated as common criminals and launched a series of protests advocating for a return to special status. These culminated in the hunger strikes. The five demands of the prisoners were: the right to wear their own clothes; the right not to do prison work; the right to freedom of association; the right to organize their own leisure activities; and the right to restoration of lost remission (reduction of sentence). Coogan 2002

[19] This is not to suggest that the hunger strike was the first instance of republican propaganda. Sinn Féin had essentially functioned as a propaganda outlet for the entirety of the conflict. However, this was the first time in the course of the Troubles that Sinn Féin chose to take an overtly electoral approach to politics.

[20] Coogan 2002; Feeney 2002

[21] See for example Coogan 2002; Feeney 2002; Bowyer Bell 1997; Geraghty 1998; Moloney 2002; Beresford 1997

[22] I will only be considering murals painted in the cities of Belfast and Derry. Although there are murals in some other locations, these are the cities with the most established histories of mural painting and are the locations of the

murals were temporary and tied to specific annual events. In particular, Twelfth of July parades, which mark the Protestant victory over Catholic forces at the Battle of the Boyne, were typically occasions for the erection of temporary murals commemorating the event. Themes of these paintings were generally the same, featuring historical events, especially depictions of King William of Orange (the victor at the Battle of the Boyne) or symbolic glorification of Britain.[23]

Although these murals were a fact of life for much of the twentieth century, they were generally static and one-sided. Catholics, in practice, could not make corresponding murals, since any attempt to do so would have been met with violence and vandalism, either from Protestant groups or from the police. However, over the course of the conflict, barricades were erected in sectarian neighborhoods, reducing the degree to which outsiders could enter these areas, and allowing Catholics to reclaim their walls.[24] However, this did not immediately lead to an adoption of murals in these areas.

When the hunger strikes began in 1981, they garnered massive publicity, in the UK and internationally. In this year, muralists in the Catholic neighborhoods began to paint a series of murals addressing this event. These primarily addressed the ongoing strike, with condemnations of the British government and glorification of the martyrs themselves being prominent themes. However, muralists also painted messages addressing general grievances or opposition to British rule.[25] Over the next several years, mural painting in the Republican areas continued, and began to develop into a rich tradition. Republican murals addressed various aspects of social life, including commemorating those killed in the course of the conflict, glorifying historical events, depicting aspects of Irish culture, electioneering, and criticizing the behavior of enemies.

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strongest concentration of murals. As such, these are the cities with the most reliable data on murals throughout the conflict.

[23] Rolston 1992
[24] Jarman 1998
[25] Rolston 1992

Although some murals have remained in place for decades ("You Are Now Entering Free Derry"; the smiling Bobby Sands[26]), many paintings only exist for a short time before they are painted over; often by the very muralists who created them in the first place. When the murals have served their purpose, they are removed, and the walls they occupied are repurposed for new images.[27]

In general, Republican murals have tended to place emphasis on the individual, creating likenesses of those involved with the movement in various forms. This includes depictions of martyred members of the paramilitary groups; those involved with non-violent resistance movements; innocent victims of the conflict; and even a wide array of historical figures who Republicans identify as predecessors to their cause. Moreover, Republicans have increasingly come to identify their struggle with anti-occupation resistance movements around the world and have painted murals expressing their solidarity with groups and individuals as diverse as the PLO, Nelson Mandela, and Leonard Peltier.[28]

In the years following the upsurge in Republican mural painting, the Unionist community began to experience something of a renaissance in its own painting tradition. While murals have a longer history in the Protestant community, the themes that they address tend to be far more circumscribed. Images of King William of Orange were key to early murals, and have consistently remained a prominent theme on Protestant walls. Other key figures in the history of Ulster Protestant conquest, such as the Apprentice Boys and Oliver Cromwell, are also present. In addition, murals in Unionist neighborhoods tend to privilege symbolism. There are several Unionist paramilitary movements, each with its own unique symbol. It was very common for members of these groups to use murals to identify areas that they controlled, and would generally

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[26] See Appendix
[27] McCormick and Jarman 2005
[28] Rolston 1992

tend to feature the group's symbol prominently. Although the Unionist paramilitaries do feature individuals martyred in their cause, they do so to a much lesser degree than the Republicans. In general, Unionist imagery tends to emphasize the masked gunman, a generic figure without name or discernible identity. This imagery is often combined with flags, symbols and slogans.[29]

Republican murals have shown a remarkable degree of dynamism, emphasizing different themes at different points in the conflict. For example, while early murals tended to emphasize the injustice of British treatment of hunger strikers and the immediate threat of police violence, as the conflict wore on, Republicans increasingly began to emphasize themes of their own cultural heritage or historical acts of resistance. In addition, periods of elections brought out a bevy of murals designed to promote (typically Sinn Féin) candidates. In addition, murals often arise in Republican neighborhoods in response to specific issues or policies. These may be social/cultural (the naming of Derry) or directly related to the conflict (plastic bullets). In Unionist neighborhoods, however, there is far less direct response to individual issues. Rather, the use of symbolic, militant, and historical themes has remained the predominant narrative. Although this is not without exceptions, it is sufficiently consistent to be worth noting that Unionist murals are far more static in their content than their Republican counterparts.

The Puzzles

Although this overview of the conflict murals is hardly comprehensive, it is adequate to point to two puzzles, which my thesis will seek to address. The first is: *Why did Republicans begin to paint murals in 1981*? The short answer to this question is that this was the year of the hunger strikes, which were the catalyst for a wave of Sinn Féin /PIRA efforts to fix public attention on the events in Northern Ireland. While correct, this explanation is insufficient. By 1981, the Troubles had already passed their first decade and many atrocities and protests had

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[29] Rolston 1992

already taken place.[30] So what was it about the 1981 hunger strikes that made it the unique event around which Republican mural propaganda could be fixed? In short, why did this event trigger propaganda when so many other high-profile events failed to do so?

This leads to the second puzzle: *Why did Republican murals develop so much more dynamism while Unionist murals remained static*? With dynamic and diverse murals, Republican artists were able to comment on a very wide array of issues, allowing them to use this propaganda platform to effectively transmit their positions on many relevant controversies while also attempting to convey a sense of community to their local population. It is surprising that Unionists engaged in a similar form of political communication would not choose to take advantage of the same array of messaging opportunities. Belfast and Derry are small cities, and while some murals were seen primarily within their own communities, others were deliberately made visible to the outside city. Moreover, the presence of Unionist graffiti on Republican murals suggests that the Unionist community was at least aware of the emerging Republican mural painting tradition.[31] Yet Unionists did not adopt the same multifaceted approach to murals as Republicans, but chose to maintain the tradition of emphasizing the themes in which they had traditionally worked. What explains this difference in narrative emphasis?

Intuition, or A Working Hypothesis

Below I present a logic that explains each of these puzzles. Together, I hope that they will form the beginnings of a preliminary theory on the function of propaganda in insurgency.

Why did Republicans begin to paint murals in 1981?

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[30] Examples include the Battle of the Bogside, Bloody Sunday, internment, and the breaking of curfews

[31] Tagging murals in rival neighborhoods was sometimes used as a form of dare. Teenagers and young adults would prove their courage and machismo by sneaking into rival territory to tag rivals' murals with the symbols of their own community, knowing that, if caught, they risked a beating, or possibly even being shot. (Jarman 1998)

The short explanation to this question is not entirely incorrect. The Republican mural painting tradition is inextricably connected to the hunger strikes of that year. This event unified, galvanized, and mobilized the Catholic community in Northern Ireland in support of the hunger strikers and built support for the Republican cause internationally. However, this belies the mechanisms by which such success occurred. In 1981, Sinn Féin was beginning to take a more active role in the Republican struggle, advocating a stronger Republican political movement. Participation in elections was controversial in Republican circles, as it was largely seen as giving legitimacy to the British system. However, as Sinn Féin gained more power relative to the gunmen, they were able to push for a unified political and military approach to the conflict, best known as the "Armalite and Ballot Box" approach. Sinn Féin devoted considerable attention to propaganda, which was directed by Danny Morrison. Morrison, who had edited the IRA's newspaper, was the spokesman for the hunger strikers and represented the increasing institutionalization of a public relations effort on the part of the IRA.[32]

I argue that it is the bureaucratization of the Provos' political efforts that explains the outbreak of murals at this particular moment in time. The coincidence of the hunger strikes with the rise in Sinn Féin's political power and its focus on securing elections necessitated an increasing focus on the unification of the community to the Republicans cause. Rather than simply exert control over the local population, the IRA now had to mobilize the broader Catholic community to express their support for the cause at the ballot box. This required the transmission of messages that conveyed a sense of common identity (us vs. them) as well as generating outrage over the grievances that the PIRA claimed to fight. Sinn Féin provided the bureaucratic

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[32] This institutionalization had begun, largely under Morrison's direction, in the mid- to late 1970s. The hunger strikes represented one of the largest PIRA public relations campaigns of the Troubles and the first explicitly tied to electoral outcomes. (Feeney 2002)

coordinating arm that allowed for this sort of mass propaganda output, and the hunger strikes

provided the triggering event.

Existence of an established propaganda bureaucracy within an insurgent organization (Sinn Féin's propagandists) + the incidence of a politically salient event (hunger strikes)→ onset of a new propaganda movement (murals)

Why Were Republican Murals More Dynamic than Unionist Ones?

I argue that Republican murals were more dynamic than unionist ones because

Republicans were fighting against an established state. While the British government did not (at

least officially) support the Unionist paramilitaries[33], the goal of these paramilitary groups was

the maintenance of the status quo and was in line with the general interest of the state actor.

Britain has a highly sophisticated media apparatus, which included such outlets as the BBC and

BBC Radio, the Times of London, and the Guardian, among others important outlets. Through

these channels, British leaders could easily spread the narrative of opposition to the PIRA and

provide justification for the continued unification of Britain and Northern Ireland. As such, these

media provide a large proportion of the Unionist narrative to the broader public. In particular,

these sources could provide extensive coverage of the attacks committed by the PIRA;

delegitimize Republican leaders by labeling them terrorists; present respected individuals who

would champion the cause of Unionism; and generally provide a narrative of British social

identity.

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[33] There is some controversy about the degree to which the British government supported the Protestant paramilitary groups. There is certainly evidence that the state colluded with them, although they also worked with republican militants, albeit to a lesser extent. (Kearney 2016)

By contrast, the PIRA had no major state media outlets providing any sort of competing narrative that advocated their cause.[34] They were responsible for providing virtually all of their messages to their domestic public.[35] This was particularly true after 1988, when the British government passed a law banning the voices of Sinn Féin and PIRA leaders such as Gerry Adams from being heard on the air. News outlets like the BBC were legally barred from giving the Republicans a platform, and the Republicans had to adapt. Murals provide a relatively cheap, effective, and emotionally resonant means of sending a variety of messages to an audience.[36] As such, Republicans made use of this tool to provide a great variety of messages.[37]

According to this theory, I expect that Unionists used propaganda murals to supplement the narratives of the established media. I argue that state media provide certain key propaganda narratives, particularly the following: the atrocities committed by the enemy; the legitimacy of the status quo; and the delegitimization of enemy leaders. Where the media does not send a strategically important message (i.e. the paramilitaries are here to defend this neighborhood; or Protestantism is the true and noble heritage of Ulster), the paramilitaries would be expected to use murals to fill the gap. Since the established news media is designed to respond to changing events, the narrative gaps are likely to be largely unchanging over the course of the conflict. Consequently, the propaganda of the Unionists should be more static. Moreover, the narratives seen in Unionist areas should be more limited, reflecting the sort of messaging that mainstream British media would not be expected to provide. The content of Republican murals, by contrast,

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[34] This is not to deny that there were media outlets with some nationalist leanings. The Sunday paper the *Irish News*, for instance, was seen as the "Catholic" newspaper, and while it opposed republican violence, had decidedly nationalist leanings. In addition, Sinn Féin had some of its own newspapers. (Bairner 1996)

[35] Although Northern Ireland received broadcasts from the Republic of Ireland, which was officially in favor of reunification, the Irish made a conscious effort to support British anti-IRA efforts by refusing to broadcast messages likely to promote or incite crime, and even refused to broadcast the voices of Sinn Féin leaders. (Bairner 1996)

[36] This is not to suggest that murals were the only form of Republican propaganda. Republicans also utilized speeches, rallies, and news pamphlets, among other tactics. However, in the interest of space, it is the only form of propaganda that this study will analyze.

[37] Bairner 1996

would be expected to be far more diverse, since Republicans had to provide a much wider array of messages. In addition, these murals should be far more dynamic in their narratives, since they had to provide a Republican viewpoint on the specific controversies and important events of any given moment in time, and therefore should be constantly updated.

Relationship of the group's goals and the state's goals (Unionists: close; Republicans: distant) + state media's provision of a favorable narrative (Unionists: yes; Republicans: no) → diversity and dynamism of group propaganda (Unionists: low; Republicans: high)

Methodology

I have compiled a collection of murals that were displayed in Belfast and Derry between 1981 and 1998. The Claremont Colleges Digital Library (CCDL) maintains records of murals in Northern Ireland, which I use as my main source. CCDL includes pictures of murals, the political affiliation of the painting (Republican, Unionist, non-aligned), the location of the mural, and descriptions of the content and context of the painting. I have compiled and organized over 650 murals from the 17 years that are the object of my study.[38]

I am currently in the process of developing a classification scheme for the murals. I plan to categorize all murals according to their main narrative theme. I will then map the murals according to theme for each year, in order to observe whether or not the narratives of these murals demonstrate the patterns of change that my theory predicts.

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[38] This is not necessarily a complete list of all murals painted in that period. Since murals are often very short lived and since many of them were painted in very violent neighborhoods, it is possible, if not likely that many of the murals are not recorded. This is particularly likely to be true in the early years of the period that I am studying, when the importance of the muralising tradition was not yet clear to scholars and there was less of a clear directive to record the murals. However, given the large number of murals that I am able to observe, I believe I have enough data to make observations about the trends in the mural narratives.

I will supplement this study with historical analysis of the Northern Irish Troubles. This conflict has been well documented by historians, journalists and former combatants. I will consult these sources to provide additional insight into the structure of militant propaganda bureaucracies and the initiatives that were taking place within the Republican and Unionists movements to address messaging gaps. By combining a historical analysis approach with geographic analysis of the changing narratives of the murals, I hope to be able to provide a systematic approach to assessing the question of how insurgents used a particular propaganda technique to deliver different messages to their target audiences.

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Appendix: Samples of Key Murals

Republican

"You Are Now Entering Free Derry"

"Smiling Bobby Sands"

Unionist

William of Orange

"Belfast Mona Lisa"